

No. 772

OCT. 14, 1911

5 CENTS

NICK CARTER

WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

A ROYAL FLUSH



BEFORE NICK COULD REPLY, MADAM
ICARD THRUST HERSELF FORWARD AND
FORCED HER WAY BETWEEN THEM &

NICK CARTER

WEEKLY

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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No. 772.

NEW YORK, October 14, 1911.

Price Five Cents.

A ROYAL FLUSH;

OR,

Nick Carter's Pursuit of a Living Mystery.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A LIVING MENACE.

"Excuse me, sir. May I speak to you for a moment?"

"Most certainly, madam."

Nick Carter halted, and raised his hat courteously to the woman who had addressed him.

It was evening, although it was not yet quite dark. The huge timepiece in the tower of the Metropolitan Building over their heads had just chimed seven, and the melody of it was still in the air when the woman stepped almost directly in the path of the detective and accosted him. He was on his way to his Madison Avenue home, and she had approached him from that direction.

"I have just come from your house, where I inquired for you," she told him. "I was informed that you were not expected home to-night, or I would have waited. It is fortunate that I happened to meet you here."

The detective bowed.

"It is true that I am not expected to return to-night," he said, in reply. "In what way can I be of service to you?"

"I want advice, sir—and assistance."

"Assistance?"

"Yes—the assistance which your recognized skill will afford me, Mr. Carter. I am in great trouble; and it seems to me that only some person as gifted as you are——"

"We need not dwell upon that, madam. My gifts, such as they are, are at the disposal of all who require them—subject to certain restrictions, of course. Do I understand that you wish to retain my professional services?"

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

"Before we go farther into the matter, may I inquire what the case is about which you wish to consult me?"

"I am afraid that I cannot tell you in a few words."

"You can, at least, inform me of the character of the services you would have me render. I then can tell you at once whether it will be worth your while to return to my home with me. You must know that there are some cases of a certain class which I never accept. So, in a word, what is it about?"

"Perhaps if I tell you my name you will understand better why I have accosted you, than if I should use up whole sentences in explaining."

"Well?"

"My name is Selina Bulwer."

"Bulwer!" exclaimed Nick in reply, repeating the name after her, for he was somewhat surprised. The name was one with which he had been much concerned of late. "I have known of several persons, recently, who bore that name, but I do not remember to have heard your given name before, in connection with it."

"Probably not, sir, since I doubt if my existence was known to any of them—with one exception. Emily Bulwer has known of me, for it is as certain as that we stand here at this moment, that Emily Bulwer, known to you as Emily Yates, was not drowned in the Potomac River, but is alive, is at liberty, and is a living menace to-day."

"I think, madam, that you had better return to my house with me," said the detective. "Shall we walk, or do you prefer to ride? Perhaps you are tired."

"I would prefer walking," she said.

For a moment after that they walked along together in silence, for Nick Carter was going over in his mind the incidents which the mention of the woman's name had suggested.

He recalled with vividness the first interview he had had with one James Stuyvesant, the accepted suitor of a certain Beatrice Bulwer, who had mysteriously disappeared from her box while attending the opera in company with some friends.

With the disappearance of Miss Bulwer and the mystery surrounding that fact, the detective had nothing to do at the time; but several months later he became convinced that his fiancée had been murdered.

The suspicion of Stuyvesant had centered upon a woman who was appearing upon a vaudeville stage in company with four others. This woman called herself the Ace of Hearts, and her companions were known respectively as the Two, Three, Four, and Five Spots of Hearts. The act of these women upon the

stage was a wonderful exhibition of marksmanship with pistols.*

We need not go more deeply into these matters than to say that after following the troupe of the Ace of Hearts to the city of Washington, and out into the State of Virginia, beyond Manassas, Nick Carter had finally come upon them in a picturesque old Virginia mansion, and had been imprisoned in a room and nearly burned to death in company with Beatrice Bulwer, whose identity was, however, not established until after her death by her own hand.

Subsequently it was developed that every known member of the Bulwer family was affected more or less severely by a strain of insanity, and at the time of this encounter upon the street, just recited, Nick Carter had reason to believe that all the Bulwer women either had died or were confined in asylums for the insane.

But Emily had been the fiend incarnate of the Bulwer family.

She, while even more mad than the others, was also more intelligent and had seemed to have a more or less well-defined method in her madness.

It was she who had been the dominant spirit of evil from first to last, for she had exerted an uncanny control over all the others, and to their ultimate undoing.

The disappearance of Beatrice and her subsequent fate had been explained by the machinations of this strange woman who, as a last act of her mad career, had compelled her chauffeur to take her out upon the Potomac River in an open boat. There she had ruthlessly struck him down, after which, it was supposed, she committed suicide by leaping into the water.

Thus the matter had been cleared up and the incidents supposedly closed; and so, something like three months had elapsed during which, in the press of other affairs, Nick Carter had dismissed the subject from his mind.

Poor James Stuyvesant, his former client, had been one of the victims of the Bulwer madness, and had paid the penalty of his association with them with his life.

It had seemed to the detective that nothing remained to do in the matter after the supposed death of Emily.

But there had been times during the three months or more that had passed since then when he had

*For a full account of the incidents having to do with these women see "The Turn of a Card," NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 770; and "The Message in the Dust," NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 771.

thought vaguely of this fiendish woman, wondering if she were indeed dead, and conjecturing what might happen if it should turn out that she had resorted to her expedient of jumping into the river merely to make the world believe that she was dead.

And now the strange woman who accosted the famous detective on the street in front of the Metropolitan Building, announced herself to be a Bulwer, with the given name of Selina. This Christian name he never had heard before in connection with any member of the Bulwer family. This woman announced, however, with apparent conviction, that Emily was not only still living, but was a menace to every person with whom she might come in contact.

It is not to be wondered that the detective, aside from being astounded by this contratemps, found himself reviewing the strange events in association with the Bulwers, while he and the woman walked together up Madison Avenue toward his home.

"Will you tell me just how you are related to the woman who is known as Emily Yates?" was the first question he asked.

"The relationship is so distant that it is hardly worth mentioning," she told him. "I am sprung from a younger branch of the family, from three generations back, and I am what an Englishman would call 'a kinswoman far-removed.' If their father and mine were living, they would be sixth or seventh cousins. I should say right here, Mr. Carter, that the dreadful malady which has afflicted the family for several generations never has occurred in my branch of it."

"That at least is good news," the detective remarked; but he turned his head a trifle to glance keenly at his companion.

She wore a veil which partly concealed her features, although he could still determine through it that she was young and beautiful.

"Why are you so certain that the woman Emily is still alive?" the detective asked, as they ascended the steps.

She smiled as she turned to him, and replied:

"There is an old saying, Mr. Carter, that 'seeing is believing.' I have seen her. Were it not for a certain fortunate circumstance, there would have been another mysterious murder for you to solve to-day. I would have been the victim of it, and Emily Yates Bulwer would have been the perpetrator of the crime. Last night she succeeded in penetrating to my sleeping room and came near to adding me to her list of human sacrifices."

CHAPTER II.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

Seated in the library of the detective's house, Selina Bulwer related in substance the following:

"That branch of the family from which sprang Emily Yates and her companions in the vaudeville act was rich; the father of Beatrice and Selma being the wealthiest of them all. There were three brothers in that branch of the family, and each brother had two daughters, all of whom were heiresses in their own right when they became of age. Emily, the eldest of them all, and a cousin to Beatrice and Selma, was never so mad that she did not appreciate the value of a dollar, and, while she used money as erratically as she did other things and seemed to care nothing for the possession of it, she resorted to every means in her power to control it. And so, little by little, she got into her own hands the fortunes of her cousins, as well as that which had descended upon herself and her one sister.

"Perhaps you know that immediately after your connection with the case, the fortune and estate left by the father of Beatrice was administered by a public officer duly appointed. It was by that means that I was discovered, and my relation to the family was established.

"It is, perhaps, needless to say, that I am now in possession of all that was left of the fortune that Beatrice would have enjoyed—and I should say right here, that she was the sanest one of the lot, and that her mania never took a homicidal form.

"However, the fact remains that the fortune is now mine, that Emily is alive and knows about it, and that she appeared before me in my sleeping room last night, as mysteriously as if she had dropped from the ceiling, and demanded it all."

"Demanded all of it?" asked Nick.

"Oh, yes, she did not mince words. She would not accept an income or even a half of what I now possess, but insisted upon having it all, claiming it was hers by right, and that my relationship to the family was so far removed that I should have none of it."

"Other things being equal, she was right in that respect, was she not?" the detective asked.

Selina Bulwer shrugged her shoulders, much after the manner of Emily. Indeed, now that she was unveiled and sat facing the detective so that the light shone full upon her face, he could see that there was a distinct family resemblance between them.

"I have no doubt," he said, "that the public admin-

istrator, whoever he was, adjusted matters properly and legally. The real heirs to the fortune that remained are insane and therefore incompetent, or are dead, as Emily, was supposed to be; and she cannot legally contend against your possession of the property, because if it is established that she is alive, the fact remains that she is hopelessly insane and must be treated so, or she is a criminal with only death or life imprisonment before her. Of course, madam, I do not doubt your word or your conviction that you saw Emily last night; but it is by no means certain that you were not deceived, and that some clever person, with whom Emily had had to do in the past, has sought to deprive you of the whole or a part of your possession."

"Well?" she asked, looking up at him.

"Tell me about what happened last night."

She hesitated for a moment before replying, then she said:

"I live at the Morford Arms with a maid for companion. I am utterly alone in the world so far as relatives are concerned, and I have been so for many years. I have never regarded as relatives these people of whom we speak."

"Well?" queried the detective.

"I occupy a small apartment at the Morford Arms, and I have always made my own living, and have done fairly well at it."

"By what method, if I may ask?"

"I am an artist. I paint portraits. I have been more or less successful, and I receive good prices for my work."

"Now what happened last night?"

"First let me tell you that three months ago, when so much was said in the papers about the revelation concerning the Bulwer family, I read all of it. Among those who know me, I was repeatedly asked if they were relatives of mine, the name being the same. I as repeatedly denied it, and it was not until the public administrator had sought me out, and, in a measure, forced me to accept the fortune that had fallen to me, that I was willing to admit even the distant kinship that existed."

"We are still wandering far from the subject," said the detective.

"I am coming to it, sir, in a moment."

"Wait, please. Am I to understand that until last night you had no information that Emily was still living?"

"I had no belief that she still lived."

"That is qualifying your answer. Just what do you mean?"

"I mean that during the last two months I have received four letters purporting to be signed by Emily, each one warning me, in a different phrase, that as soon as it was convenient to do so she should call upon me to hand over to her the fortune in my possession."

"So she had warned you of her coming?"

"Yes—if I had chosen to accept those letters as warning."

"You did not so regard them?"

"No."

"What was your opinion of them?"

"I thought them to be the work of some clever schemer who sought to get part of my wealth away from me by frightening me."

"So you paid no attention to the letters?"

"None whatever. I could not have done so had I wished."

"Why not?"

"There was no address given in any of them to which I might send a reply."

"Do you mean that the letters did not call for answers?"

"They did not. They merely made statements. They went no further than to inform me that she, Emily, was living and that, within an uncertain time, she should call upon me to hand over the property to her."

"Did she make no threat as to when and how she would appear?"

"Not one."

"You had no information of the time of her coming, then?"

"None at all."

"You saved the four letters that you received?"

"I am sorry to say that I did not."

"Do you mean to say that you destroyed them?"

"I did. I regarded them as the work of a schemer, as containing idle threats, and as worthy of no more consideration than anonymous letters. I invariably destroyed them as soon as received."

"Can you recall the wording, or any particular portion of them?"

"I think I could repeat the last one I received—almost word for word."

"Let me hear it."

"Very well; she said, in effect, this: 'I have previously sent you three letters apprising you of my intended call and of the demand that I shall make

upon you. This is to warn you that I shall appear now very soon at a very unexpected hour and place to make that demand, and that I shall expect you, if you value your life, to be prepared to make full restitution to me of the property you now wrongfully hold in your possession. It is mine and not yours. I must have it, and you shall not. So have it ready for me, if you would continue to live. Emily.' That, Mr. Carter, is substantially all that it contained, and it was, in effect, the substance of all of them."

"Did you feel no alarm when you received this last letter?"

"None."

"Had you no idea that a person would call upon you to make a demand such as outlined in that letter?"

"Oh, I thought perhaps that some person would come to see me. But I am not given to personal fears. The handwriting of the letter was a woman's. I regard myself as quite capable physically to cope against any woman and most men. Of course it never occurred to me that this person would appear in my presence as she did."

"We have arrived at the point at last," said the detective.

"Yes."

"Now, what were your experiences last night?"

"I had been entertaining guests in my apartment during the evening. They remained until midnight, and after their departure, when I had prepared myself for bed, I took a magazine and read it for perhaps an hour, so it was approximately one o'clock when I extinguished my light. I think I was wakeful after that, and I should say that it was no earlier than half past one when I dropped asleep."

"Well?"

"I was awakened by the glare of the electric light shining in my eyes. I started to a sitting posture in the bed to discover that a woman in evening dress, as if she were robed for a reception, was standing beside my bed, holding a pistol which was pointed directly at me. Her face was concealed from view by a half mask, the drapery of which also hid her mouth and chin from me.

"I have come to keep my appointment," she said, in a voice that sounded strangely like my own."

"I have already perceived a likeness in your voice," Nick replied.

"I did not in the least understand her," the woman continued. "For the moment I had utterly forgotten the letters and the threats which they had contained."

"I am Emily," she said, and the low laugh which followed this statement was sufficiently chilling and menacing to bring to mind at once the woman of the letters.

"She came a few steps nearer to me, still holding the pistol pointed at me, and said: 'I have come to fulfill the promise I made in the letters I have sent you. The fortune which a public official has given into your keeping is mine, and not yours. Are you prepared to turn it over to me, or must I carry out the threat I have already made?'

"I was instantly convinced of the reality of the threats, and of the identity of the woman who faced me. I was instantly assured that it was Emily Yates Bulwer who stood there—that I was face to face with a madwoman who held a pistol in her hand, and who would not hesitate to kill, if the whim seized upon her to do so. For an instant I cast about me in my mind for a means of temporizing; but I saw that she was in no mood to be played with or deceived, and I comprehended the fact that I was facing a crisis.

"Where is it?" she demanded. 'Have you it ready for me?'

"The question and the manner in which she asked the questions convinced me of her insanity. I tried to smile, and I think I succeeded. I raised my right hand and pointed toward my desk in the corner of the room behind her.

"It is there—in my desk," I said.

"All of it?" she inquired.

"As much of it as I could get together for you," I told her.

"In cash?"

"Mostly in cash," I said, shrugging my shoulders.

"Mr. Carter, you have heard of, and doubtless you have read about, the stereotyped, gleeful laugh of a maniac. I heard it then. Without turning her head, without moving any part of her body save her first finger, so far as I could see, she pressed upon the trigger of the weapon she held in her hand, it was discharged, and I fell back upon the bed as if I had been shot; for, truth to tell, I thought I had been. But I was amazed to find that I was unhurt, that no bullet had struck me, and, with it all, I had sense enough to remain perfectly still and motionless."

"The bullet did not touch you?"

"I doubt, Mr. Carter, if there was a bullet in the cartridge. I think it must have been a blank. I have heard much about the wonderful marksmanship of Emily, and I was close enough to her to know that

the weapon was pointed directly at my heart. If there was a bullet in that cartridge I would have been killed. As it was I simulated unconsciousness, and she, knowing her own skill with the weapon, never doubted for a moment that she had killed me. She did not even take the trouble to examine me critically. More than that—and here her insanity again made its appearance—the fact that she had committed another crime seemed to drive from her mind all thought of the real purpose of her errand. She looked toward me where I was lying on the bed, laughed, and went out of the room, closing the door behind her; and I was too frightened to move until she had had ample time to make good her escape."

CHAPTER III.

THE WOMAN IN THE CHAIR.

"Is that all of the story?" the detective asked.

"That is all," Selina Bulwer replied.

"She made no attempt to search your desk, where you had indicated that the money was deposited?"

"None."

"Tell me just what she did do after firing the pistol point-blank at you."

"You must remember that I was myself dazed and more than half unconscious immediately after she fired at me. The shock of it, and the belief that I had been shot, will explain that."

"Yes."

"Moreover, I kept my eyes closed for an interval, after which I managed to peer at her through my lashes. She was standing quite still, exactly where she had been, and the only change in her attitude was that her right hand, which had held the pistol, was dropped beside her. After a moment, she raised her left hand and removed the mask, and then—she went out of the room as I have said. That is all."

"You made no attempt to pursue her?"

"None. I have already confessed that I was frightened."

"Were not other people in the house alarmed by the pistol shot?"

"It would seem that it was not heard at all. Even my maid, asleep in her room at the other end of the apartment, was not aroused."

The detective was silent for a moment, then he said:

"Without intending any offense, madam, it would be quite logical for the average man upon hearing the

story you have recited to believe that you had dreamed it, or—had invented it."

"I feared that you might take that view of it," she replied.

"I am not saying that I take that view of it, although it is quite as logical as the story you tell. You must admit that the facts, as you relate them, if they are facts, are unprecedented and extremely unusual."

She nodded, but made no reply. The detective continued:

"Rather more than three months ago Emily Yates Bulwer compelled a man who had been acting as her chauffeur to take her out upon the Potomac River in an open boat where, after striking him down, she disappeared, presumably having leaped into the water. There has not been the slightest trace of her discovered since that time. Every person interested in her existence has decided that she drowned, and now you come here to me with this remarkable story——"

"Do you think that I have invented it, Mr. Carter?"

"No; I will not say that. Did your visitor leave anything behind her in her flight from your room?"

"She left the mask that she had been wearing. That is all."

"How did she gain admittance to your apartment?"

"I don't know, unless she used a key."

"The Morford Arms, where you live, keeps a man on duty at the front entrance and the elevator all night, I believe?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Have you asked any questions to-day concerning whether your strange visitor was seen to enter or leave the house?"

"I have. I have made full inquiry."

"With no consequent discovery?"

"No woman such as I described was seen to enter the house or to leave it at any time during the night, and no person at all at or near the time when I was disturbed."

"You say that she was in evening dress, as if she had been attending a function of some sort?"

"Yes; and she wore jewels. Draped from her shoulders was an exquisitely embroidered opera coat. One might have supposed that she had stepped from a brougham at the door where a coachman and footman awaited her return. In fact, Mr. Carter, her costume and her bearing were such that it would not have occurred to any employee of the building to have stopped her, and still less would it have been

possible for the elevator man to have forgotten her had he seen her at all."

"Again the detective was silent.

His instinct in the beginning had been to accept all that this woman told him; to believe that she was indeed all that she claimed to be; but there were elements about her story which compelled him to ask himself if this was not another exhibition of the known insanity in the Bulwer family.

And she, looking upon him, saw that he was incredulous.

"It is too bad that you do not believe me," she said, leaving her chair, and making ready to depart. "The story is a strange one, I know. Yesterday notwithstanding that I had received the four letters I have described to you, I was not afraid—for then I had not seen Emily. To-day I am frightened."

"Are you sure, madam, that you are not deceiving yourself?"

"Quite so."

"If only you had one of the letters in your possession——"

"But I have not. I have destroyed them."

"You see, there is nothing in this tale you have told me, but——" he hesitated.

"Nothing but my unsupported word, Mr. Carter."

"I did not mean that. It is not at all what I was about to say."

"I know; but it is in your thoughts. Very well, let it go at that. I see that I cannot get the assistance from you that I sought."

"What assistance did you seek?"

"Protection. I am frightened. I am afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of that woman. Of my life. Listen to me for a moment, sir."

"Well?"

"I came here to engage your services to find Emily Bulwer. I know that she is alive. You can find her. Being alive and at liberty, she is a menace to all society. You will concede that, won't you?"

"Yes."

"Then it would seem to me to be your duty to apprehend her if you can do so."

"It is; and I will make the effort. For, you see, madam, even if you had come to me with this tale, knowing it to be untrue, it still would be my duty to investigate it."

"I think I understand you. You think that I am deceiving myself."

"I think that it is possible that you are deceiving

yourself; that it is possible that you have dreamed this thing, and so vividly that it had become fact in your mind. And again I will admit that it is quite likely all true—in which case I wrong you grievously by merely the shadow of a doubt; and so, Miss Bulwer, I shall give you the benefit of the doubt. I will investigate."

"Thank you."

"I will go to the Morford Arms in the morning—no, I will go there to-night, when the same man will be on duty at the elevator who should have been there at the hour you believe you received that strange call."

"Thank you again."

"And, madam, I would suggest that you yourself go elsewhere for the night; that you do not return there now."

"Why?"

"Because if it is really a fact that Emily Bulwer called upon you last night, and thought that she shot you, she will appear there again to-night, having learned that you were not injured. If all that you have told me is actually true, that apartment is not a safe place for you to-night."

She made no reply. He added:

"If Emily was there, and entered as you say she did, she has a key to the apartment, and so can admit herself at any hour to your rooms."

"And I would be alone to-night, too," the woman said, more to herself than to him.

"Where is your maid?" asked Nick.

"She asked for the day and evening to visit some relatives in the country, and I told her that she need not return till morning; so I will be alone."

"I assume that you told your maid nothing of what you have related to me?"

"Nothing. I have told nobody but you."

"In that case I shall insist that you do not return to-night. Is there not another place to which you can go?"

"Yes."

"Then, in order to be on the safe side, promise me that you will not pass the night in your own rooms. Will you do that?"

"Yes."

"Also that you will not be offended by any doubts that I have expressed?"

"Yes. I am not offended. Now that I think it over, I do not in the least blame you for your incredulity."

"Thank you," said Nick, extending his hand to her.

"Your present attitude makes me think now that I

have been wrong all along, and that you actually did experience all you have told me. I will accept it as a fact, if you will not remain there to-night."

"I will not. I promise you that."

"In which case, Miss Bulwer, I will make another suggestion."

"Yes? What is it?"

"Give me your key and tell me the number of your apartment. I shall go to the Morford Arms at midnight, or near that time. In your absence, and with your approval, I will pass an hour or two in your rooms. It might happen, that if Emily should decide to make another call there to-night, I would be there to receive her."

"It is a splendid idea, Mr. Carter."

"Then we will understand it so, if you will give me the key."

She sought for it in her purse and handed it to him.

"The apartment is 'Thirteen-D,'" she said. "Of course you understand that this is a regular business arrangement, and that I shall expect to pay you for all that you do? I would not think of——"

"We will discuss that later, Miss Bulwer—after I have looked into the matter a little more closely."

She left him then, and he escorted her to the door.

After the visitor was gone, the detective went to his study and seated himself alone without turning on the lights; for, now that he thought the matter all over, and recalled all that he knew about the insane members of the Bulwer family, it was possible to believe anything of them.

His reluctance to believe all that Selina Bulwer had told him arose less from the story's illogical qualities and its unusualness, than from the thought that this woman was perhaps not entirely free from the taint of insanity, and that that being so, she might well have wrought herself into a condition of mind where she had imagined all that she had told him, and imagining it, believed it. He believed that he would be able to determine a good deal as to that by visiting the apartment during the night, in Selina's absence, and making a thorough search of it.

At midnight he went out.

He arrived at the Morford Arms half an hour later and rang the bell at the entrance, for the negro on duty had locked the door and was dozing in his chair before the telephone board.

It had been the intention of the detective to question the man before he ascended in the elevator, but the negro was so sleepy that he did not even notice that Nick was a stranger to the house. He conducted

the detective to the elevator without a word, ascended with him, stopping the elevator and permitting Nick to leave it still without a word when the required floor was reached. Nick decided that he would leave the questions until he came out again.

Number 13-D was located at the end of the corridor at the rear of the building. The elevator had descended again when Nick opened the door with his key and entered. He was surprised the instant he opened the door to find that one of the rooms—evidently the parlor—was brilliantly alight.

He moved quickly forward along the private hallway, and stepped across the threshold into the lighted room.

Then he halted abruptly, for there, seated upon a Morris chair beside the table in the middle of the room, and dressed exactly as she had been when they parted, even to hat and gloves, was the woman who had introduced herself to him as Selina Bulwer.

She was dead!

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROYAL FLUSH.

There was a round bullet hole in the middle of Selina Bulwer's forehead. This was made by a bullet of small caliber.

The detective's first impression was that Miss Bulwer, possessing an extra key to her own apartment, had returned to it after parting with the detective, in order to possess herself of some necessary article, before going elsewhere for the night; and that her murderer had been there at the time, and had waited until she had seated herself upon the chair where Nick found her, and then had fired the fatal shot.

When the detective first discovered the body, he halted; then he followed an invariable custom with him at such times, when there was opportunity. He stood quite still where he was while he examined with his eyes every portion of the room and the surroundings.

It was evident at a glance that Selina had been shot deliberately; also that the bullet had been fired from the very doorway where Nick Carter now stood.

Thus it was that the detective decided that either the person who fired the fatal shot had been already in the apartment when Selina arrived, or had admitted herself with a third key, immediately afterward, and had crept stealthily forward, and so surprised her victim. Everything indicated that Selina had not known of her danger, and had been killed so suddenly that

there could have been no shock or pain attending the tragedy.

It did not appear that the contents of the room had been disturbed either before or after the fatality. There was no evidence of confusion anywhere. It was, indeed, as if some person had stepped forward to that doorway from the outside, had fired the shot, and had then withdrawn as he or she had come—save for just one thing: There were five playing cards, evidently taken from an ordinary pack, laid out upon her lap. Nick stepped forward to look at them.

The cards were the ten, jack, queen, king, and ace of hearts—a royal flush, the winning hand in a game of poker; but surely a losing hand this time in the game of life and death, with this dead woman.

Nick recalled that the Bulwers, among their other manias, had been card fiends; but until now he had never seen any evidence of their interest in the game of poker. Selma Bulwer—or she who had represented herself as Selma—had cleaned off the top of a roulette table and played with the ivory ball just before she took her own life; and she had written her last message in the dust that had gathered upon the top of a faro table. Emily had been given to gambling wherever she had appeared; and now the sightless eyes of this dead woman were turned upon a royal flush spread out before her.

To the detective, the presence of the cards where they were was sufficient evidence that Emily Bulwer was alive and at large, and that she had done this awful thing; but it would not be convincing proof to twelve men in a jury box.

Then, while he looked upon the scene, it occurred to him that he was himself in an exceedingly false position.

There he was in an apartment he had never seen before, in the presence of a dead woman whose body was not yet cold; a woman whom he had seen only once, and whom—but he shrugged his shoulders and stopped thinking along those lines.

The worst had happened!

He was glad now that he had advised against Selina's returning to the apartment, although she had done so in spite of what he had said against it.

If she had gone there to remain, following upon his own incredulity in regard to her story, he might have blamed himself somewhat for what had happened; as it was, he could not do that.

With quick but quiet steps he began a search of the apartment.

He looked into every room and into each closet.

He sought everywhere, but nowhere did he discover the slightest evidence of another presence.

So far as he could see, not a thing in the place had been disturbed, or removed. There was nothing to suggest any other motive than wantonness, in the commission of the crime.

Satisfied of that much, the detective let himself out again upon the corridor of the building.

He paused just outside the closed door for a moment, and then, instead of ringing for the elevator, he went cautiously and noiselessly down the stairs that wound around the shaft; and so he descended the four flights to the bottom.

The negro was sound asleep in his chair at the telephone board, and Nick went around him, opened the front door, and passed outside, closing the door after him, without making a sound and without waking the sleeping man.

Outside he rang the bell, and continued to ring it for some time before the negro was roused to wakefulness; but, the fellow came to the door at last, and Nick entered the house for the second time.

He paused for an instant to observe if there was any sign of recognition, or of recollection of him in the negro's manner.

But there was not the slightest indication of it. The man gazed upon the detective as sleepily and as blankly as he had done so the first time. There seemed to be no recollection of that other call.

"Does Miss Selina Bulwer live here?" Nick asked.

"Yas, sir," was the sleepy reply. And then, after a short pause—"Thirteen-D."

"Is she at home?"

"Dunno, sir. I'll call up and see if you'll give me your name."

"Don't you know whether she came in to-night or not, since you have been on duty?"

"No, sir. I ain't seen her."

"Has any person called here within the last hour?"

"No, sir; nobody ain't been here to-night at all."

"Have you ever seen me before?"

"No, sir."

"Didn't you take a gentleman up in the elevator less than an hour ago?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Co'se I'm sure, boss. Nobody ain't been here to-night at all."

"You have been asleep, haven't you?"

"No, sir. Never was wider awake in my life."

"Well, instead of calling on that telephone, suppose

you try to remember who it was that came into the house about midnight last night. Did you see a very beautiful lady last night, all dressed up, and with an opera cloak over her shoulders, and diamonds in her ears?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Yassir."

"Now try again and see if you can remember that I came into this house, and that you took me in the elevator to floor D less than an hour ago."

"No, sir; I couldn't remember it because it didn't happen. Guess I'd know it if I had done that."

"Do you know Miss Bulwer by sight? Do you know her when you see her?"

"Yassir."

"What time did you come on duty to-night?"

"Seven o'clock."

"Have you seen her at all since you came on duty?"

The negro scratched his head thoughtfully for a moment; then he replied, showing his teeth with gratification because he did remember.

"Yassir. 'Bout nine o'clock she came in and went to her apartment."

"Who came in with her? Anybody at all?"

"No, sir. She was alone."

"Was anybody else in the elevator with her when you carried her up to her floor?"

"No, sir."

"Now, do you think you can remember the lady I just described, whom I thought was here last night? I mean, didn't you see that same lady again to-night, and didn't she get off at floor D?"

"No, sir. There ain't nobody at all come in since I took Miss Bulwer up, only Mr. Wilson, on F, and Mr. Gardner, on C."

Nick saw that there was absolutely no use in questioning the negro further. The fact that the man had no recollection of having admitted him, proved that he was one of the sort that does certain things with mechanical precision when more than half asleep, and that all recollection of having done them instantly fades from the mind.

The detective considered a moment. Then he dropped upon the chair at the telephone board and put the receiver to his ear.

"Listen to what I am about to say over this telephone," he ordered the man. "Perhaps what you hear will wake you up."

"Yassir," replied the negro, yawning from ear to

ear; but he was startled when he heard the detective say:

"Hello, central. Police headquarters, if you please."

Then, a moment later, when he had secured the call, Nick added:

"This is Nick Carter talking. I am at the Morford Arms in West Seventy-fifth Street. There has been a murder here to-night. If you will send officers to the house at once, I will be at the front door to receive them. No; I can't say positively anything about that. I am reasonably certain who did it, but proof is still lacking. The dead woman is Miss Selina Bulwer. All right. Good-by."

The negro was rolling his eyes in terror as the detective removed the receiver and turned to him again.

"Wh-wh-what's that, b-b-boss?" he demanded.

But the detective made no reply. He left the chair and went to the front door where he stood upon the steps, waiting.

CHAPTER V.

A PUZZLE OF FIVE CARDS. O

It was Detective Conroy who responded to the summons that Nick Carter had sent to police headquarters.

There were two uniformed officers with him and also another detective. Nick was told that the coroner's office had been notified, and that everything concerning the murder would take its regular course from that moment.

The detective drew Conroy aside as soon as they had viewed the body and the room wherein it was found, and they went into the kitchen of the apartment where they would be alone. There they seated themselves.

Conroy had never been informed of the facts concerning the Bulwer family save what he had read in the newspapers from time to time, and so, Nick, before questions could be asked, gave the detective from headquarters a general résumé of all the matters concerning that remarkable family that he knew.

He told also of the encounter on the street in front of the Metropolitan Building, the preceding evening, with Selina Bulwer, and he related the conversation that had passed between them subsequent to that meeting.

He concluded by saying:

"So, you see, Conroy, it is like this: There can be no doubt that Emily Yates Bulwer is alive, and that she did make the call last night that Selina said she

did. I had doubts about the truth of that story when it was first related to me, but I am now convinced that it was the truth.

"My doubts arose from the unusualness of it, from the fact that, although Selina was fired at point-blank, no bullet struck her and from the others facts as I have related them. Coupled with that, was my knowledge that insanity has always affected the Bulwer family, and I was inclined to believe that Selina was not entirely free from it.

"This led me to think that Selina, also having a diseased mind, might have imagined the things she told me, and that her imagination was so vivid that she became entirely convinced of the truth of her own statements.

"But, before she left me, she seemed so sincere that I gave her the benefit of the doubt, and warned her not to pass the night again in this apartment—at least not last night.

"However, she must have come to this apartment directly from my house, for the negro remembers—and it is the only thing he does remember—that she arrived here and came to her rooms approximately at eight o'clock.

"Now it follows, according to the sequence of events, that one of two things must have happened: Either Emily was already here awaiting her return, having arrived during Selina's absence or possibly having followed her to my house, and then returned here to wait for her; or she let herself in silently with a key which she undoubtedly possessed to the outer door while Selina was here; that she discovered her victim seated in the chair where I found her, and deliberately committed the act which took her life.

"Now, it would appear that, immediately after doing that, Emily left these rooms without disturbing anything.

"We must assume, everything considered, that Emily is the guilty party in this business. There is no other conclusion to reach. Of course we know that she is of unsound mind—is probably much crazier now than when I last saw her—months ago. This would account for her leaving the apartment as soon as she had committed the deed of violence. Her blood lust was satisfied.

"A murder done by one who has homicidal mania affects the one who commits the crime very much as liquor or a drug will affect an habitué of it; either it has the effect of a sedative or it exerts the exhilarating influence of a strong stimulant.

"The crimes that have been committed by Emily in

the past invariably have produced the former effect upon her, which is an added reason for my conviction of her guilt in this instance.

"The mere fact that she left the room at once after committing the deed, and without pausing to disturb anything or even to look about her, or to search for money which she doubtless supposed to be concealed here, is proof of the quieting effect upon her of what she had done.

"A drunkard who, after a long round of dissipation, has been deprived of his stimulant for several consecutive hours becomes almost frenzied in his eagerness for it; but, being supplied, he immediately seats himself somewhere, quite content with his surroundings, and, for the time being, remains passive.

"This is precisely the effect that this murder must have had upon Emily Bulwer.

"Having fired the bullet into the brain of her victim, she quietly returned the pistol to her pocket and walked away. The money which she believed might be concealed here held no attractions for her at that time. She had taken the sedative which was to bring her peace and contentment for a short time.

"Now the question arises: Where shall we look for Emily?"

Conroy shifted his left leg across the right one and was silent, shaking his head in doubt.

"We cannot pursue her by any known rule of procedure that is known to our business, Con, for we must not forget that she is crazy—as insane as any one of the occupants of Bloomingdale or Matteawan."

"And it is to be presumed that she possesses all the cunning of an insane person," said Conroy.

"Yes, all of that cunning, added to an undoubted original intelligence which is extraordinary, and that intelligence would remain as acute as ever throughout her disease, although it would be distorted and unreliable."

"Which fact makes it all the more difficult to shadow her," said Conroy.

"Just that."

"Have you any idea about the matter, Nick?"

The detective shook his head.

"I have many ideas," he replied, "but none of them satisfy me."

"Don't you suppose that negro can be made to talk?"

"He would talk readily enough if he had anything to talk about. Con, but he has already told me everything he knows."

"Do you mean that he has forgotten?"

"No, I mean that he never knew."

"I don't think I understand you."

"Youth is proverbially sleepy-headed. This negro is a young man. It has been his habit to sleep soundly during the hours he is on duty here. While sleeping, he is frequently called upon to open the front door and to take passengers to one or more of the upper floors in the building. He performs those duties mechanically, and while still sleeping, although his eyes are open and he seems to be awake because he can answer readily enough the few questions that are likely to be asked him."

"I see," said Conroy.

"It is subconsciousness of the man, working to perform the routine of regular duties. It would require something out of the ordinary to rouse him sufficiently so that he would have any recollection of things that happened. For example, it was not until I called headquarters on the telephone and announced that a murder had been committed in the house that the negro really woke. Although I talked with him for some moments before I did that, it is a safe bet that he would have forgotten all about it by morning had not something out of the ordinary happened to rouse him. No, Con, he cannot be depended upon for any information in this matter."

"He remembers to have seen Selina Bulwer enter the house about eight o'clock?"

"Yes, but that was only an hour after he came on duty. It was not yet his sleeping time."

"Well, would not the appearance of a woman in evening dress and jewels, as Selina described her caller last night, be inclined to rouse him?"

"That is the point at which I was arriving," said the detective.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if it was an unusual thing—I will put it still more strongly than that—if it were an unprecedented thing for a woman in full evening dress with a display of jewels to enter the house in the middle of the night and ascend the elevator, he might have been astounded into wakefulness by such an occurrence, particularly if the woman was unknown to him."

"Ah! I see."

"What is it that you see, Con?"

"You are assuming, are you not, that Emily Bulwer in evening dress was not an unusual sight to the negro?"

"Exactly."

"That carries with it the assumption, as I understand you, that she may be a tenant of this house?"

"Correct."

"Then we ought to search here first."

"Yes; but such a search as you speak of could not be made just now. It is two o'clock in the morning, and it would not do to rout the innocent tenants out of their beds to question them. A great many would be needlessly frightened by such an act, and it would not be quite just to the owners of the building."

"No."

"There is another point in the case that I would like to ask you about," said Conroy, after a pause.

"Well, what is that?"

"The cards found on the lap of the dead woman—the royal flush."

"What have you in your mind about them?" asked Nick.

"I don't know. In the light of all that you have told me about the previous history of the women of the Bulwer family they seem to be afflicted by two manias, distinct from each other and equally absorbing—the homicidal mania and the gambling mania."

Nick nodded.

"Do you suppose, Nick, that the royal flush had any particular meaning in this instance?"

"I confess, Con, that I don't know just what to make of those cards. There is no doubt that the woman had a distinct idea in her mind when she put them there, but I am as puzzled as you are concerning her."

CHAPTER VI.

PROVING A THEORY.

Conroy took entire charge of the case, representing the police department. Nick Carter, because of his familiarity with the affairs of the Bulwers, was requested to work with him.

During the remainder of the hours of darkness, the two detectives examined every scrap of paper, every ornament and every article in the apartment of the dead woman, believing it possible that the murderer might, after all, have done some searching there and have left some sort of clew as to her identity.

Not a thing was discovered which was of assistance to them.

In the early morning they went outside for their breakfast, returning before any of the tenants of the house should leave it. They stood on guard at the front door of the building, keenly watching every per-

son who left or entered, although, when any person approached them, they were ostensibly engaged in earnest conversation together.

No one came out or entered who was of sufficient interest to them to be stopped and questioned, and it was not until ten o'clock that they determined upon making a round of all the apartments in the building under the escort of the superintendent, whom they told to ring at each door and to announce to the persons who answered his ring that two gentlemen were inspecting the building.

By this means, in something less than an hour, they had found opportunity to peer into the faces of every woman in that building. In no apartment did they find one whose features gave them the slightest cause for suspicion.

Three of the apartments, although furnished, were unoccupied, and the superintendent of the building, who understood perfectly what the detectives sought, referred to these rooms as if he did not deem it necessary that they should examine them.

"Why?" said Nick. "Those are the very places that I want most to see."

"All right," replied the superintendent. "Two of them have been vacant several months, and the tenant left the other one about three weeks ago."

"Good!" said Nick. "We will examine that one first."

"What do you expect to find here?" asked Conroy, as they passed through the door into the apartment which the superintendent had mentioned last.

But Nick Carter made no answer.

He passed through the private hall, then he led the way into the parlor of the suite. He had scarcely crossed the threshold when he came to a pause, and pointed toward a table in the middle of the room.

Some dust had gathered on the table, but not much. The top of it was bare save for a pack of cards that had been divided into five piles which extended in a straight line across it.

Conroy stepped forward at once toward the table, but Nick reached out a hand and detained him.

"Wait a moment, Con," he said. "I am going to do a little feat of guessing here."

"What sort of guessing? What do you mean?"

"Do you know any tricks with cards, Conroy?"

"A few—tricks that I learned when I was a boy."

"Did you ever seen a person divide a pack of cards into five piles, then run off five cards from one of them and name the next five that would appear consecutively?"

"No, I don't think I have."

"Well, there is such a trick as that, Con, but whether it has been done here or not, I cannot say. However, I would like to try an experiment."

"What sort of an experiment?"

"We do not know which one of those five files was the first one, and so we must select a pile at random; and again, if the first one we select is not the right one, we must try another, and so on until we find what we seek—for I think we will find it."

"I don't in the least know what you're talking about, Nick."

"Well, in the first place, you must remember that we found five exposed cards on the lap of the dead woman—the ten, jack, queen, king, and ace of hearts."

"I remember that, all right."

"You must recall the fact, also, that the woman we think has committed a murder is afflicted with a mania for cards."

"I'm not likely to forget that, either."

"Just now her mania runs to a royal flush in hearts."

"So it would appear."

"Very well. If those five cards are in her mind—if they were sufficiently prominent in her demented mind for her to make use of them as some sort of a sign in the commission of the crime, it was the result of some fixed idea in her crazed brain."

"Go on, Nick."

"Somewhere among those fifty-two cards on that table, we should find the ten, jack, queen, king, and ace of hearts together. The fact that the cards have been divided into five piles made me think that she was attempting the old trick, which I have partly described, to bring those five cards together."

"But where is the importance of it?"

"The importance of it exists only in determining if Emily Bulwer is the woman who has occupied this apartment. You and I can see at a glance that there is probably nothing else left here to determine who was the tenant, but if we find those five cards together, knowing what we do know, the fact ought to satisfy us."

"I think so."

The detective reached out and took one of the five piles of cards from the table. He ran off five of them from the top of it and then turned five more face upward on the table.

They proved to be an indiscriminate mixture, and the detective pushed them aside, dropping the remainder of the pile on top of them without examining them.

"Why not look at the first five cards you counted off, and also at the remainder of the pile?" Conroy asked.

"Because, Con, if in doing so I should find the royal flush of hearts together, the fact would not satisfy me. My theory, to be worth anything at all, must work out as I have outlined it to you. However, you may examine the rest of the cards in that pile, if you care to do so."

Conroy turned over the remaining cards of the pile and spread them out before him. Nowhere among them did he discover any of the five cards they sought.

Nick selected the second pile and treated it as he had done the first one, with no better results; and again Conroy turned over the remaining cards and spread them out with precisely the same result that he had obtained in the first instance.

"Go on, Nick, try again," he said.

The third pile examined was no different than the other two had been in its consequence, nor was the fourth one. As Nick Carter reached out his hand for the fifth and last of the piles of cards, he said, with a slight smile:

"This is our last chance, Con, to prove my theory. I suppose you have often noticed the fact that, in looking for any particular object among others of the same character, the one you seek is apt to be the last one examined."

"Sure thing," said Conroy, with an answering smile. "I have thought a good many times that a chap ought to look at the last one first—particularly in our business."

"In that case," said Nick, "it wouldn't be the last one at all. It would be the first one," and he picked up the cards, ran off five of them, and then threw the first of the following five face upward on the table.

It was the ten of hearts, and Conroy bent forward eagerly, almost breathlessly.

The detective removed the second card and threw it down as he had done with the other one. They found it to be the jack of hearts; then rapidly he did the same thing with the remaining three more, exposing the queen, king, and ace of the same suit, in the order named.

Nick Carter had established the theory that he had advanced when he discovered the five neat piles of cards, divided from one pack, upon the table.

"Well?" he asked inquiringly, raising his eyes to Conroy.

The latter shrugged his broad shoulders and smiled faintly.

"It beats me, Nick," he said. "That is altogether out of my province. I don't know by what method of reasoning you arrived at the determination you did, but I cannot deny that it has panned out superbly. All the same, how the blazes you knew——"

"I didn't know, Con. I didn't even guess. It was as much the result of clear reasoning as that by which you conclude that if you raise these cards above the table, and drop them, they will fall upon it."

Conroy whistled to express his astonishment.

"It was like this," said Nick: "In that other apartment, where we knew Emily Bulwer had committed a crime, she left for our enlightenment an exhibit of her card mania in the form of a royal flush of hearts. Here in this room, vacated by its tenants approximately three weeks ago, we find a pack of cards divided into five piles upon a table in the middle of the room. Judging things by sequence, as you know we must do in all criminal cases, we had to assume that her mania would leave her exhibits here as elsewhere."

"Perhaps I'm stupid, but I don't see what you're getting at, Nick."

"This: If we had not found the royal flush of hearts together in one of those five piles of cards, I should have said—and would have had no doubt of the truth of my statement—that it was not Emily Bulwer who placed the cards on that table; and it was for the same reason that I determined in my own mind that if Emily Bulwer had been here, if she was the tenant of this apartment, and if she did leave those cards upon the table where we found them, the royal flush of hearts would be found together in one of the piles. It is the natural deduction, and is arrived at simply because we know that those five cards for some unknown reason were constantly in her mind before she committed the murder, as evidenced by the cards we found upon the dead woman's lap."

"Well, what are we to conclude from all of it?"

"This much only: That Emily knew that her relative was a tenant of one of the apartments of this house, and that she came here to live herself because of that knowledge; that she, in response to her homicidal mania, determined three weeks ago—at about the time she left this apartment—to do the murder which she committed last night; that she had lived here long enough to render her face and appearance familiar to the man in charge of the elevator, and long enough to familiarize herself thoroughly with the building and

to possess herself of a key to Selina's apartment; and we know now why the negro paid no attention to her on either of the last two occasions she was here—last night and the night before."

"All the same, Nick, we're just as much up a tree as to where to look for her as we were before."

"Not quite, Con. We've got a basis to work upon now; and just here is where our friend the superintendent comes into the game."

The superintendent, who had been a silent witness to all that had occurred, shook his head in response to this appeal.

"I'm afraid I can't help you, Mr. Carter," he said.

"I don't know the least thing about the woman."

"You mean, I suppose, that you have no idea where she went when she left here," said Nick, turning toward him.

"Yes," the man replied.

"But isn't it true that you do know where she came from when she came here? This is one of the buildings where you require references from tenants, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Did you examine those references?"

"No; the agent does that."

"Very good. And now, Con, if you will follow up that little idea about the agent as suggested by my question, I will look in another direction. But first, before we leave this apartment, we'll take a careful look around it. It is possible that even Emily Bulwer, cunning as she is, may have left something behind her to indicate her future intentions."

CHAPTER VII.

THE WRITING ON THE WINDOWS.

The apartment consisted of four rooms, and, as the superintendent explained to the detective, had been sublet to the woman who had lived there under the name of Madam Bowers, for the season, furnished, and "the season," as he explained, for which she had paid in advance, still had five weeks to run.

"She told me, when she went away," he explained to Nick, "that if I could sublet the apartment again for the balance of the time, I might keep the difference. That is all I know about it."

"Did she give no reason for her sudden departure?" the detective asked.

"None. She merely said that she was leaving."

"But didn't you ask her where her mail should be forwarded?"

"Yes. That is a question that we always ask, although in this particular case it was unnecessary, since she never received any. I don't think she had a letter while she was in the house."

"What reply did she make?"

"She told me that there would be no mail to forward."

"Well?"

"But if any should come," I insisted.

"Throw it away," she replied. Then she went out. That is the last time I saw her."

"What baggage did she take with her?"

"Two or three trunks, as I remember; some books—and a table done up in burlap."

"What sort of a table?"

"I can't exactly say, only it was peculiar in shape."

"A card table, likely," said Conroy, who had lingered to listen.

"Have you heard anything from the woman since then?" Nick asked the superintendent.

"No, sir. Not a word."

"And, personally, you do not know that she has been inside the house since that time?"

"I do not. Tell me this, Mr. Carter."

"Well?"

"Is it your idea that she committed that murder?"

"Yes. Distinctly so."

"And that she came here expressly for that purpose?"

"Yes."

"It is strange, is it not? She seemed harmless enough. She spent almost all of her time in her rooms. She rarely went out."

"What about callers? Did she receive any?"

"Very few, if any, sir."

"I have not asked you to describe her appearance. Will you do that now?"

"Well, she was neither tall nor short; about medium height, I should say."

"Yes."

"She had dark eyes. I couldn't say that they were exactly black. She had a young face, and if it were not that her hair was white, I should have said that she was quite young. Her face was that of a woman of twenty-five or thereabouts."

"Her hair was white, you say?"

"As white as snow; yes. I used to think that she made it so, with some preparation that women use."

"Possibly that is true. Did you notice her teeth?"

"They were very white and even. One of the two front ones had been filled with gold. It was almost a gold tooth."

"Precisely," said the detective. "Thank you. There is no longer any doubt, Con. I am wondering how she dared to appear upon the streets here, without any disguise. But perhaps she did not. Possibly she disguised herself when she did go out."

"Yes; and it is quite possible that she went out oftener than the superintendent supposes. Being so fond of cards, she may have spent her nights in gambling, and used the daylight for sleeping."

"Quite right, Con. That is the 'other direction' in which I proposed to seek her, when I asked you to interview the agent. Now we will take a further look around these rooms, although there isn't the slightest chance of finding anything."

But Nick did find something—an odd thing, too.

They had completed their survey of the place, and Nick had stepped to a window which commanded rather an extensive view of the river. He was looking out, thinking, when he called out suddenly:

"Come here, Con!"

His friend—for the two were old and tried friends—approached quickly, and Nick pointed to some scratches on one of the glass panes of the window through which he had been gazing.

That the marks had been made with a diamond, probably a ring upon the finger of some person, was at once apparent.

"Tell me what you see here, and what you make of the scratches," said Nick, pointing to them.

"I see a figure five, and, underneath it, a figure four," replied Conroy. "Then there is a line drawn under them, and beneath that is the figure one."

"Meaning that four, subtracted from five, leaves one; eh?"

"That would be the natural assumption; yes."

"Now, look further, Con. There are more scratches there."

"I was trying to make out what they are, Nick."

"This one, for example," said the detective. "What is that?"

"Give it up. There are two almost alike, in the opposite upper corners of the windowpane—one of them is much smaller than the others."

"So I see. Do you play chess, Con?"

"No."

"Well, did you ever, in any old-fashioned home that you have visited, see mottoes on the walls, in frames?"

"Sure. 'Welcome,' 'God Bless Our Home,' and that sort of thing."

"Think again. There is another one that used to be quite common."

"'No Cross, No Crown,' eh?"

"Precisely. I once heard a boy who was peering in at a store window and who saw that motto, read it, 'No Tea, No Teapot.' But it is the crown part of it that I want you to remember just now."

"Well?"

"That outline—both of them, in fact—are good representations of rudely drawn crowns; eh?"

"Why, yes, now that you speak of it."

"Now, referring to a game of chess again, we remember that the crowns of the king and queen are slightly different; and, right here, if we look at the bottom corners of the pane of glass we discover a badly written letter J in one of the corners, and a rudely made unit and cipher, forming the number ten, in the other one; and here, as you see, is a long, straight scratch down through the middle of the pane."

"Another royal flush, eh?"

"No; it's a straight this time—the ten, jack, queen, king, and ace."

"But what does the 'four from five leaves one' means?"

"I don't know. Let's have a look at the other windows."

It seemed that the woman had amused herself in scratching the windowpanes with her diamond ring, for there was at least one pane in each window that had been so marked, and in two of the windows of the apartment every pane of glass had some sort of scratching upon it.

Although, in the main, the scratches were undecipherable, and seemed to have no significance at all, there were three of them which evidently had a meaning. Nick could not determine, however, whether the marks had been placed there inadvertently, or by design.

Upon the first of the three panes was an oblong square, with a rudely made heart drawn in the middle of it; and beneath the heart was a small letter z.

Upon the second pane were four small, oblong squares, side by side; they contained no marks inside of them.

The third one bore the outlines of a coffin, and the fourth held a circle containing two round holes to represent eyes, a triangular hole to represent the nose, and a straight line beneath it for the mouth. This might represent either a face, or a skull, but, doubtless, it had been intended to suggest the latter because

of other marks which might have been intended for crossbones, beneath it.

"I can't pretend to read what they mean," said Nick, after studying them, "only that one, no doubt, is intended for the ace of hearts, which Emily Yates used to call herself; and the letter z under it might mean that she is the last of her race, or family."

"Or intended to be the last—eh, Nick?" said Conroy.

"By Jove, Con, I guess you've struck it!"

"The murder on the floor beneath us would carry out that idea."

"It would."

"Oh, well, what's the use? You can't depend upon anything that a crazy woman says or does. I now will go and call upon the agent for this house. Where shall we see each other again?"

"I'll telephone you," replied Nick. "Wait a moment, though."

"Well?"

"Who is the best-posted man in your department, in regard to the gambling joints in the city?"

"Platzek—without any question."

"Oh, yes. I know him. I wonder if I could catch him down at headquarters about now?"

"No. You'll find him at his home, probably. He's on sick leave, but he is about ready to report for duty again. If you want him to aid you, now is just the time."

"Good! I'll go there at once, if you will give me his address."

Outside the building they found a swarm of reporters, who besieged them with questions, none of which could be answered just then; but Nick finally broke away from them and hurried to the subway on his way to the home of Detective Platzek. He discovered, when he arrived there, that Conroy already had telephoned to him about the matter, and that Platzek was quite prepared to give Nick Carter all the assistance in his power.

And right here it should be said, in deference to Detective Miron Platzek, that his employment in the department was such that he used his knowledge of the gambling element of the city in order to further his other cases, and that he was told to do so, leaving to others assigned to such duties the onus of bringing "common gamblers" to justice.

But he would not have given up his knowledge even to Nick Carter, had not his own side partner, Conroy, asked him to do so.

"You're just in time, Carter," he said to Nick. "Tomorrow I must report back at headquarters at noon; but, until then, I am at your disposal. So tell me what you want to know, and we'll get about it."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUGGESTION OF A CLEW.

"How much did Con tell you over the phone?" Nick asked.

"Mighty little—just that a murder had been committed, and that you were with him on the case; that you think you know who did it, and that the only clew you've got to work upon to find the woman is a mighty good hand in the game of poker. Is that straight, or was Con living up to his name, and throwing it into me?"

"It's true, all right."

"Tell me about it."

"First, then, I start out on this thing absolutely certain that I know the person who did it."

"Yes."

"Second, I know her by sight, and would recognize her instantly if I came across her."

"Well, that's a lot in the games we have to play, Nick."

"But the thing I don't know is where to look for her."

"I see."

"Third, the woman is crazy. I don't mean that she is just a crank; I mean that she is literally an insane person."

"I understand."

"She has two decided manias. One of them is homicidal, as you have doubtless guessed; the other one is spelled c-a-r-d-s."

"T'fn on. Well?"

"Do you remember five women who did an act on the stage here less than a year ago—the head one of the bunch calling herself the Ace of Hearts? She did a shooting act, and could shoot some, too."

"You bet. Do you mean that it is that woman?"

"Yes. The one who played the part of the Ace."

"That is where the card mania comes in, is it?"

"That is part of it. Wherever those five women went, they had layouts of faro, roulette, and all the rest of it. They were gamblers, all of them—and this one is a gambler. She can no more leave a pack of cards alone, than she can live without breathing."

"And now, in a word, you want to look for her in some gambling joint."

"I want to visit every gambling room in the city, whether high or low, until I get on her trail, for I am certain that I will strike it in that manner."

"Well, we can't very well go at this time of day."

"No. But we can lay our plans for to-night."

"Sure thing."

"You see, Platzek, being a woman, she could not frequent one of the ordinary places, where men go indiscriminately. It would have to be a place where women are admitted."

"Unless she made up as a man, and——"

"She couldn't do that."

"Why not? She is an actress."

"She couldn't do it and carry it off. She is too feminine, and she hasn't the figure for it."

"It won't take us long to work those places, Nick. There are very few of them."

"And, Platzek, it isn't at all likely that we will find her, or get a trace of her in any one of them that you know about at the present moment."

"Then, what the dickens did you come to me for?"

"Because, while there may be half a dozen such places as I have described that you know all about, and can get into without any trouble, there are doubtless twice as many more of them that you never heard about. Those are the places I want to find."

"But, if I don't know about them, how do you expect me to——"

"I expect you to find out about them at the places you do know about, and from the persons who frequent those places. It may take us a couple of nights to do it, but it can be done."

"Nick, I don't think there is a regular, dyed-in-the-wool gambling joint in the city that I don't know how to find, whether it is frequented by men or women, or both."

"Correct! I don't think so, either; but it isn't likely that this will be a regular place."

"Oh, I see! A private house, where they do gambling on the quiet."

"Yes. Something of that sort."

"H'm; they won't be so dead easy to spot, Nick."

"That is why I asked you to help me."

"Thanks! That's very nice of you—only I don't see how we are to get at them. You see, people who operate a place of the sort you describe are mighty shady about it, and they don't admit anybody but those whom they call personal friends. It isn't enough

merely to have an acquaintance. One must be known."

"Well, to quote you, you are known to a lot of people who know what you want to know, and who will tell it to you, if you go about it in the right way."

"Maybe so; but I doubt it."

"Think for a minute. Haven't you now a man in your mind who might be able to give us some enlightenment?"

"Not one—not a single one that I could name."

"I'm not referring to the regular gamblers, who spend night after night in such places, but to somebody who has the 'open sesame' to all such places, and who drops in occasionally. Can't you think of such a man?"

"Not right off the bat. I know several who might know, but I haven't the slightest idea whether or not they do know of such places."

"You can find that out by deft questioning."

"I can try, anyhow."

"How about the women?"

"Eh?"

"Don't you know any women who gamble, and who have a passion for it?"

"Sure. Lots of 'em."

"Well, think up their names. Find out where they go to play the bank, or the wheel, or just the cards. We'll find the woman in one of those places, or we will get a trace of her."

"Maybe so. I dunno. Say!"

"Well?"

"Do you happen to know if this woman you are after speaks French?"

"Like a Parisian. Why?"

"Did you ever hear of Madame Icard?"

"I have seen the name in the newspapers. I am not sure that I have not seen a picture of a woman that was reputed to be her."

"Of course you have."

"Why do you ask, Platzek?"

"She has a whole suite of rooms at the Mammoth—the 'Princess Suite,' they call it there—there must be a dozen rooms, more or less, and I'd be willing to bet that she doesn't pay less than a thousand or fifteen hundred a week for it."

"Probably not. But what of her?"

"I happen to know her; that's all."

"What of that?"

"She's an odd character, that is all. She goes out

of her hotel only on one evening in the week—Monday. Every other night in the week she 'receives.'"

"Gambles, eh? That is what you mean, isn't it?"

"Yes—bridge parties one night—other kind of parties other nights—and I suspect that they play everything there, from casino to Mexican monte, and have every device from hazard and race horses, to the wheel. I don't know it, mind you; I only suspect it; and it hadn't occurred to me till you began to talk about it."

"I see. Well, you had something else on your mind."

"True. It was this: If there are games going on at the rooms of Madame Icard, and if your woman speaks French like a native—for that is the only language they talk at her gatherings, I have been told—isn't it likely that she may be known there?"

"I should say that it is extremely likely."

"Of course, I don't know whether this ace woman can do the act or not among the highbrows, low-necks, and fat bank rolls. You know that."

"Well, she can. That is what she was born to. More than that, she has lived abroad a great deal, and in Paris much of the time when she was in Europe."

"Then take it from me, we will find her there, if anywhere."

"Are you persona grata there?"

"Hey? What did you say?"

"Will the lady receive you? Would you be a welcome guest?"

"I reckon so. I don't know. But I happened, by accident, to do her a pretty big favor the other day—last Monday evening, it was—her night out, you know."

"Yes. What was it that you did for her?"

"I saved her life, that's all. She'd have been run down and killed by a taxi, if I had not been within reach of her. I pulled her out of danger, and she was duly grateful. She insisted upon my accompanying her to her hotel, when she found that I wouldn't take any reward for what I did, and then she had me up in that palace of hers on the thirty-first floor; and she blew me to a glass of wine, and insisted upon my accepting this stick pin I'm wearing, just as a memento of the occasion. She then asked me to come again whenever I could—any evening in the week but Monday. See?"

"I see."

"Well, we'll call her bluff. We'll go there this very night."

"But what makes you suppose that there is gaming going on there, Platzek?"

"It's known downtown, all right. We have laughed about it more than once, when Flynn and the others have been making their raids. We never laughed at Flynn any—not so's you could notice it, for he would raid her as quick as he would any other place in town—but we used to josh the rest of the bunch about it. We asked 'em why they didn't try the hydraulic on Madame Icard's door, and all that sort of thing."

"All right," said the detective. "We will go there to-night, if you think she will admit me, too, on the strength of her acquaintance with you."

"Surest thing you know. And, say, it's dress suits, and all that, you know."

"Certainly. By the way, does she know what business you are in, Platz?"

"Not in print, she doesn't. I told her that I was a wine merchant, and I happened to be pretty well toggled out at the time, so it passed."

"Good! If she indulges in gambling in her apartment at the hotel, wine merchants are exactly in her line."

"Yes. I thought of that afterward. In fact, I thought of it when I said it, for I remembered what had been said about her receptions, downtown."

"Good! Then I'll meet you in the Gold Room, at the Mammoth, to-night—at what time?"

"Make it ten-thirty. We don't want to get there too early; and she told me, when she gave me the invitation, to show up at any hour that suited me best, provided it was not before ten or after three. Now, what do you think of that?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE WOMAN AT THE WHEEL.

Nick Carter and Platzek met in the gold room, which is near to the café, at the Hotel Mammoth, at half past ten that night, in accordance with the appointment they had made.

Nick, who entered the room two or three minutes ahead of the appointed time, found that Platzek was already awaiting him, and had selected a table in a remote corner, where the isolation was more or less complete.

Platzek looked up with a nod as the detective approached, and Nick seated himself opposite the headquarters man, who made some casual remark about the evening and the weather, while the waiter hovered

near them. As soon as Nick had given an order, and the man was gone, Platzek said:

"It seems to be rather a gala night upstairs, Nick. I have been here an hour, and I have been keeping tabs as well as I could of the people who had gone up. I got here early, for that purpose."

Nick nodded. He was not particularly interested by this statement. He hoped, of course, that the woman he sought would be among Madame Icard's guests that night, but he had little faith that it would be so. Their visit that night to the woman who entertained so lavishly was, after all, nothing but a gamble.

Both the detectives were immaculate in evening dress, and Nick was looking, as he thought, at his best, notwithstanding the fact that he had practically no sleep at all the preceding night.

"Shall we go up now?" he asked, after the waiter had served what had been ordered.

"Whenever you say," responded Platzek; and so, after a few moments more, they were giving their cards to the major-domo at the door of the Icard apartments, and were ushered into a small reception room to await her pleasure.

She came presently—a stout, commanding figure of a woman approaching middle age. She carried herself wonderfully well, and was handsome, having the appearance of one who was bold and assertive.

The instant she entered the room, Nick saw that the name on the cards presented to her had meant nothing; but her expression changed the instant she saw Platzek, whom she recognized at once as the person who saved her from the taxicab.

She crossed the room, and greeted him cordially, exclaiming as she did so—and with just a faint touch of accent to her words:

"It is indeed one great pleasure to see you here, Monsieur Platzek. And your friend?"

"My friend is Mr. Felix Parsons," said Platzek, presenting Nick in due form, for this had been the name agreed upon between them for the evening's use. "I urged him to come with me, feeling assured that you would welcome him."

"Most certainly, monsieur. Any friend of yours will always be welcome at my home, whether it be in New York or in my beloved Paris. Will you not come inside to the salon with me?"

They followed her through the private corridor of the apartment to the spacious parlor, where many of the guests were assembled, and where an orchestra of three pieces, screened by growing plants, was playing softly.

Here there was no sign of gambling in any form, nor was there any indication that the reception was other than merely an informal one.

Nick, who scanned the faces of the assembled guests, quickly but thoroughly, saw not a face among them that he recognized.

The hostess paused near the middle of the room when many of the guests, perceiving that strangers were about to be introduced, raised their eyes inquiringly.

"Messieurs Platzek and Parsons, ladies and gentlemen," she said; and then, with a smile, she turned to Nick, who was nearest to her, and added: "It is all the introduction that is necessary, my friend. You may now feel on terms of cordiality with any and all of them; and—pray excuse me."

She left them then to find chairs for themselves, and, as if by common consent, although they were not prepared for the circumstance, they approached opposite ends of the room, Nick selecting a youngish but rather beautiful woman, who was seated somewhat apart from the others, in a deep, leather chair, beside which was a smaller and lighter one that was unoccupied.

He dropped upon it beside her, saying, with a smile, as he did so:

"As the magnet draws the steel, so am I attracted to you, madam."

"How delightfully you say it," she returned, with a shrug of her white shoulders, for they were uncovered. "One might suppose you to be a countryman of my own."

"You are French, then?" he asked.

"Can you doubt it?"

"No; I would not doubt that all are French here, or, at least, practically so."

"Yes," she nodded brightly at him, "with a sprinkling of Russia and Italy here and there. But foreigners—as you would call it—all."

"And this is your weekly rendezvous?" he asked.

"Nightly would be the better word," she responded.

"Am I to understand that this is your first attendance at Madame Icard's?"

"My first," he replied. "And I do not see among the guests whom I have noticed a single face that I recognize. It is as if I were in another country or in a different city from my own, where all are unknown to me."

"We come from everywhere," she told him, and she shrugged her shoulders and flashed her eyes at him—"attracted by that one magnet which is more powerful even than a woman's eyes."

"You mean—what, madam?" he asked.

"I mean that goddess before whom all the world bows in adoration."

"The goddess of Chance?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"But I do not see her face in this room," said the detective, looking about him with the air of one who is searching, and yet managing to impress upon her the idea that he was joking.

Just at that moment Madame Icard returned and crossed the room directly to Platzek, to whom she addressed a few remarks in an undertone. The headquarters man left his seat and followed her out of the room.

She was gone only a few minutes. When she returned again she paused at the threshold of the door and beckoned, with an imperious gesture, to Nick Carter.

With a hasty word of excuse, he left his companion and crossed to her.

"At your service, madame," he said.

"I am transgressing one of my own rules, Mr. Parsons," she told him, in a low tone. "It has never been my custom to introduce comparative strangers to the other rooms of my suites, but the obligation I am under to Monsieur Platzek—you know what that obligation is, sir?"

"Yes," he told her.

"The obligation that I am under to your friend places him in the attitude of a long-time acquaintance, and so——"

She shrugged her shoulders, and passed on across that room they had entered and into another one, Nick following her leisurely. The moment he had passed beyond that second threshold he realized that the conjectures of Platzek had been entirely correct.

Here, in this room, which was even larger than the parlor where he had been first received, was every modern device of gambling.

Two faro tables were in full play, and were surrounded by throngs of devotees, who were too much absorbed in their occupation even to raise their eyes at the approach of another.

A roulette wheel was whirling merrily, the ball singing its enticing tune to the victim of its absorbing magic in another part of the room, and here, also, several persons were standing; but, as the detective quickly observed, only one of them was playing the wheel; the others were looking on with every evidence of undivided interest.

And it was a woman who was playing the wheel—a woman whose back was toward the detective and who wore a lace mantilla draped over her head and hair, to her shoulders, so that it effectually concealed her from his view. Nick's gaze swept onward to the various tables in the apartment.

At one of these he saw Platzek in the act of taking a chair which another man was vacating. He saw that the game in progress was baccarat.

Madame Icard spoke to him.

"You care to play?" she asked, smiling upon him. "The tables are at your service. You have but to take your choice."

"Don't let me detain you, madame," he replied. "You have your several duties to perform, and I am quite capable of taking care of myself."

"Thank you," she said, and she moved away from him.

For a moment he stood where he was, scanning the faces and the backs of the head and the profiles of the people in the room; then he moved slowly across the floor toward the sound of the whirring ball in the roulette wheel, impelled by nothing at all, save the fact that even to him who had never been a gambler, the sound of it and the uncertainty as to which compartment the ivory ball would select was infinitely attractive.

He stopped at the end of the table, watching the ball as it rolled, and forgetting, for the moment, the woman in black with the lace mantilla and the hidden face and shoulders—the woman who had first attracted him.

"Double O," the dealer called out, as the ball came to a stop. The operator at the table was a woman, too, as were the dealers at the faro table.

Then it was that the detective raised his eyes to glance along the table at the face of the woman who had won, for already he had seen the stack of chips upon the square of the table marked with the double O.

And then it was that he found himself looking straight into the eyes of Emily Yates Bulwer.

The recognition was mutual and instantaneous.

CHAPTER X.

SOME MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES.

There are moments in the life of every person when impulse is the only rule of action.

It has been said of Nick Carter that he was delib-

erately impulsive, which expression sounds like a paradox, because deliberation and impulsive action cannot well go together.

But it had always been true of Nick Carter's experiences that he only appeared to act upon impulse, because of his talent for thinking quickly and weighing circumstances accurately.

Here was an encounter, however, which he had not anticipated.

At no moment had he really believed it likely that he would find the woman he sought at Madame Icard's. True, there had been a chance always that she might be one of the devotees at that place; but it was only a chance, and a faint one, at that.

There she was at the roulette wheel, however, and without the semblance of a disguise of any sort, playing deliberately and winning wonderfully, as the stacks of chips beside her evidenced.

When Nick Carter's eyes met hers, and he recognized her, he took that impulsive action which has already been intimated, and stepped quickly past the three persons who intervened. Then, touching her upon the arm, he said:

"Oblige me, madam, by cashing in your chips. I have much to say to you."

The moment her eyes met his, she realized that Nick Carter had sought and found her. She gasped, with a quick catch in her breath, and, clenching her hands into two tiny fists that would have struck a blow had she dared to do so, she took a step backward away from the table.

"All this happened in an instant, but, brief as it was, it was dramatic, and the attention of the others was instantly attracted.

She did not reply to him; and, after an interval during which three might have been counted slowly, she relaxed the fingers of her right hand, extended the arm over the table, and mechanically shoved her piles of chips, one after another, toward the woman who presided at the wheel.

There must have been something in the hush that succeeded this brief encounter which attracted the attention of the persons at the other tables, for a silence

fell upon the room, and Nick, without looking up—he did not care at that moment to remove his gaze from Emily—realized that every pair of eyes there was fixed upon him.

We say he did not care to take his eyes away from Emily, and that is true, because he knew her to be a dangerous woman, not averse to using her favorite weapon, the pistol; and he well knew the utter accuracy of her aim if she should elect to make use of it just then.

One who had given exhibitions of pistol practice upon the stage, and who had unerringly, time after time, struck with a bullet from a pistol in her hand the trigger of another weapon whirling in the air, could not miss such a mark as he presented as he stood beside her.

And he well knew it to be a desperate moment with her!

The crimes with which she was charged before this last outbreak, which had resulted in the death of Selina Bulwer, were sufficient in themselves; but now here she was, fresh from this last monstrous wrong—the cold-blooded murder of her kinswoman in the apartment at the Morford Arms.

What she did then, after the instant of thought which she took advantage of while moving her chips from the edge to the center of the table was one of the greatest surprises of Nick Carter's experience.

He had expected a bullet, or, at least, an attempt to fire one at him. He received, instead, a few softly spoken words, a bewitching smile which revealed the resourceful beauty of the woman, and he saw her shrug her shoulders daintily while she inclined her head to one side and glanced up at him out of the corners of her wonderful eyes.

"You will wait a moment until there are three more rolls of the ball?" she asked him presently. "After that I will talk with you. You know that I always give myself a certain number of plays of an evening—no more or no less."

"As you will," he replied to her, amazed by her coolness and in admiration of her resourcefulness.

The dealer already had replaced the chips in the

rack, and was counting out in hundred-dollar bills the money which Emily had won. Emily, apparently without noticing the amount, drew it toward her, at the same time reclaiming a stack of chips which had not yet been counted, and shoving it upon the board with only a glance at the number upon which she played.

Indeed, it would have seemed that she did not notice, and cared less, what that number might be, for it was only with one swift glance toward the table, that she secured the bills, and it did not appear that she took any heed at all of the number she played after that.

The hum of voices throughout the room began again, and those who had been momentarily distracted from their occupations, evidently assumed that there had been no occasion for it.

Madame Icard alone, ever watchful, moved swiftly across the apartment toward them, and stood beside Emily and opposite Nick when the ivory ball once more began to whirl inside the wheel.

There is always a dead silence around a roulette table at such an interval, and this moment was no exception to the rule.

"Thirty-five!" called out the operator; and then, in a lower tone, added the question: "Cash, or chips, madam?"

"A marker for the full amount," replied Emily, "and everything goes on the same number for the next two rolls. After that I am through."

Again the ball whirled around the wheel, and again, as if by some uncanny attraction, it sought and found the number thirty-five.

The markers upon that number were changed to represent the immense sum that Emily had won, and the ball whirled and dropped, for the third time, into the little compartment of the wheel that was numbered "35."

The operator at the wheel, from an apparently exhaustless supply of funds, counted the cash that was due to Emily for her winnings, and thrust it toward her across the table; and again Emily, as if without interest, received the money and crowded it into a gold chatelaine bag suspended from her belt.

Then calmly she turned to face the detective.

"I am at your service now, Mr. Carter," she said to him in English, and making use of his name, for she had not heard him introduced by the name of Parsons, of course. "You had something you wished to say to me?"

Before he could reply, Madame Icard thrust herself forward and forced her way between them.

"What name did I hear used just now?" she demanded.

Nick could see that the eyes of the hostess were blazing with anger. She, too, spoke in English, and this time with perfect enunciation, and without an indication of accent. "Is your name, then, Carter? Were you presented to me falsely? Are you Nick Carter, the detective? Have I been made the victim of an imposition?"

She stamped her foot, in an excess of temper, and, without waiting for a reply from the detective, she crossed the space between the roulette table and the wall, reached out, and snapped off an electric switch, which was there within reach of her hand.

Instantly the room was in total darkness.

Nick Carter reached out his left hand toward the space which Emily had filled, and, as it fell in the darkness upon the arm of a woman who stood there, he seized and held it in his grasp.

But he knew the instant his fingers touched that arm that it was not Emily Bulwer he had grasped, but some one else who had, in that briefest of intervals, taken her place.

The arm which he was grasping was larger than that of the woman who had been playing roulette.

Realizing that he had been foiled in his effort to seize Emily, he released his grasp upon the arm, moved quickly aside, and then stepped as quickly toward the switch in the wall which he had seen Madame Icard make use of.

The fact that he collided with two persons—a woman and a man—as he made this move, did not impede him. He merely thrust each of them aside, reached out for the electric switch, and snapped it on again.

The interval during which the lights were out and

the room was in darkness was not longer than would be required to count five, and yet, as he whirled about and shot his glance quickly from face to face and from figure to figure in that room, he discovered, to his amazement, that neither Emily Bulwer nor Madame Icard remained in it.

Both had disappeared, and yet he was certain that there had been no time for them to have reached one of the doors.

At the opposite side of the room Platzek was on his feet looking this way and that in amazed consternation, for he had had no inkling of Nick's discovery of the presence of Emily Yates in that room.

But Nick Carter at once cast aside all consideration for Madame Icard and her guests.

He was now intent only upon securing the prisoner who had been almost in his grasp, and who had evaded him so skillfully with the aid of Madame Icard.

He called out to Platzek.

"Find Madame Icard for me," he directed. "The Ace of Hearts is here."

There were approximately a score of persons in that room. These were standing in different attitudes, surprised and alarmed at what had happened, and totally without understanding as to the cause of it.

When Nick called out to Platzek as he did, he started toward the door which was nearest to him, and which opened upon a room that he had not seen—a room opposite to the door by which he had entered.

But he had not taken five steps toward it when there was another snapping click, and the lights went out a second time.

The detective had taken his bearings perfectly in that swift glance of his, however, and, instead of stopping, he increased his pace, and leaped forward toward the door, reached it, and threw it open, expecting to discover that the room beyond was lighted.

But it was not so. The lights there were extinguished, as well, and as he reached into his pocket for his electric torch the lights in the room behind him flashed on again, for Platzek had found the switch and turned it.

Then both detectives became conscious of an amazing fact.

Nick, near the threshold of the door by which he would have left the room, and Platzek, who, over by the wall, with one hand raised and his fingers still touching the switch he had turned, were alone.

The score or more of persons who had been there but a moment before, had disappeared as mysteriously as the two women had done.

And all this happened in the Princess Suite of the great Hotel Mammoth, the pride of New York and one of the most modern buildings in the world.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DESERTED ROOM.

When we assert that Nick Carter and Miron Platzek were alone in that deserted gambling room, more is meant than appears on the surface of that remark, for the room itself had undergone a decided change during the brief interval that had elapsed.

Not only had the people who had been there disappeared, but all of the paraphernalia of gambling evidently had gone by the same route.

The faro tables, the roulette wheel, the high chairs upon which the watchers at faro had been seated, the cards, and the racks of chips—everything that pertained at all to the arts of gambling, had gone the way of the people who had been playing, and there was absolutely nothing left to tell what had been going on there.

It is the stereotyped thing to do for one to rub one's eyes and stare, in such circumstances. But Nick Carter did neither. He laughed.

"Well, what do you think of that, Platzek?" he demanded.

But he did not await a reply. There were other things to be done at once, instead of pausing to speculate upon what had happened.

Nick's trained intelligence told him how the thing had been done, although a suite in the great Hotel Mammoth, and one of the best of them, too, was literally the last spot in all the world where he could have been expected to meet with such an experience.

"Quick, Platzek!" he called. "To the floor beneath this one, for that is the way they have gone. Catch the Madame Icard, if you can, and bring her back here."

Although the detective rushed from the room hastily, he was careful to put back the catch on the lock of the door by which he went out, and, followed by the man from headquarters, he ran down the stairs to the floor below, and to the door which gave upon the apartment that was directly beneath the one where so much had happened in so short a time.

But, before he reached the door toward which he was running, he paused, and then came to a full stop, for already he could see that he was too late.

The door stood invitingly open. All was dark inside, save for the light that shone in from the corridor.

It was only necessary for them to peer inside the rooms on that floor, and to snap on the lights for a moment, to know that the "birds had flown."

The room into which they looked was that one directly under the gambling room, and, although it was furnished after the manner of the other rooms in that luxurious hotel, it was otherwise vacant, notwithstanding the fact that it bore evidences of recent occupancy.

"No good searching here, or anywhere else near here, for the present," said Nick.

"What in blazes happened, anyhow?" asked Platzek, as they began to ascend the steps to the top floor. "Was I dreaming, or did we see a lot of guys playing games?"

"We saw them, all right," replied the detective. "That is a clever woman, Plat," he added. "She was ready for just such an emergency."

"But what happened? You said that the woman was there, in that room, but——"

"The thing that really happened—the thing that has brought all this about—was that Emily Bulwer, the Ace of Hearts, called me by name in speaking to me, and the madam recognized it."

"Recognized your name?"

"Yes. She evidently knew all about Nick Carter, although she did not know the man; and I suppose she thought she was pulled; or else——"

"Or else what?"

"Or else, when she heard the name, she knew that I was after Emily."

"Oh, I see!"

"And that seems as likely as the other idea."

"Sure."

"Anyhow, they have succeeded in getting away, and we are not much nearer to the actual capture than we were before."

"Will you tell me how they did it?"

"How they did what?"

"Got away."

"Elevators, Plat!"

"Elevators! What the dickens—— They didn't have time to get to the elevators."

"My dear chap, all they had to do to get to the elevators they made use of was to step up quite close to the gambling tables the instant the room was in darkness, and to stand there."

"Say, Nick, I suppose I'm stupid; but I'll be blown if I understand what you are talking about."

"You can read print when you see it, can't you, if the light is good, and the print is plain?"

"I reckon so."

"Well, cutting out the escape part of it, how do you read the other circumstances?"

"What other ones?"

"The faro tables, the wheel, the other things; and the throng of players who were at them."

"Oh, the madam runs a regular joint, of course."

"Surest thing you know, Plat. This suite of rooms that we are now entering has been a regular gambling house, only it has been run on the strict quiet; and—don't forget this, either—with the connivance of the hotel people, of course."

"Of course."

"When that hotel was built, Plat, those rooms were planned to meet just such an emergency as arose to-night. Of course, I do not refer to the fact of our being there after a murderer; but they were planned to make just such a get-away if it should ever be necessary to do it."

"I guess there is no doubt about that—not now."

"Did you take notice, Plat, of the unusual thickness between the floor of the room and the ceiling of the room beneath? You could see it as we ascended the stairs, for it extends throughout the entire floor."

"I didn't notice particularly."

"Well, when this building was erected, it was planned to have a gambling joint in the Princess Suite, on the top floor, for even then the cops were chasing gamblers out of the city."

"I know."

"And the people who financed this building foresaw the immense profit of running such a place after a manner and in a place where it would not be suspected."

"That is about the size of it, I suppose. The madam is really not the proprietor at all, eh?"

"Certainly not. She is the manager. The hotel itself runs the joint—or, at least, it gathers in the shekels that are the profit of it."

"Sure."

"Do you remember the large square rugs that were beneath each of the gaming tables in this room?"

"Sure."

"And don't you see that the rugs that occupy their places now, although of the same patterns, are not worn at all, as the others were?"

"By Jove, yes!"

"You see how it was all done, don't you?"

"Yes—only you go ahead and explain it, all the same. I am beginning to think that there are a good many things that I don't see."

"If you will lift up the edge of that rug nearest you—one of the faro tables stood right there—I think you will find that the pattern of the flooring just beneath it forms a perfect square, and that square will indicate the edges of the platform which acts as an elevator when some secret spring near us is pressed."

"You mean that the whole business would descend to the floor below?"

"Just that—and with all the people who were grouped closely around the tables."

"Gee whiz!"

"Neat, isn't it?"

"I should say so! But——"

"But what?"

"What has become of the tables? They weren't downstairs, and they are not here. So where are they?"

"Collapsible tables, Platzek."

"Sure. I guessed that. But where are they? How did they get rid of them?"

"They are somewhere between this floor on which we are standing, and the ceiling of the room beneath us."

"But, Nick, this thing has to come back again, just as it went down, as it did do, or it would have left a hole that a taxicab could fall through, and there would have been"—he counted around the room—"five just such holes. One of the poker tables is here yet. It did not disappear with the others."

"Do you want me to explain just how I think the thing was done?" the detective asked.

"Yes, if you will."

"The first alarm—the first snapping out of the lights, done by the madam—was sufficient to send the wise ones close up to the tables, so that they would stand upon one of the elevators. See that?"

"Yes."

"But I snapped the lights on again so quickly that there was no time to work the get-away. However, all was in readiness when they went out the second time. You understand that?"

"Yes."

"The lights were out some time—that time. It took you a full minute to find that switch. You had to grope along the wall for it."

"Yes."

"That was time enough for the platforms with the tables and the people to descend. There was time enough for them to collapse the tables, to fold the other rugs over them, to pull out a sliding section of flooring under them, and so to let them down into the space under it, and to slide the section back again over them, with these new rugs upon them. Then the platforms

were sent back into place with nothing on them only what you see now, and the tables that were there are now folded together a few inches out of our sight. That is all there is to it."

CHAPTER XII.

A TENTATIVE ARREST.

"But there isn't time, and there is no need to go into all of that now," said the detective.

"No," exclaimed Platzek, starting for the door. "We must——"

"Wait!" said the detective calmly.

"Well?"

"Make haste slowly, Plat. Let us consider."

"But, in the meantime, your birds are flying."

"No, they're not. At least, I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"Because, instead of flying, they are very quietly pluming their feathers, and preening. They are congratulating themselves upon the extremely clever get-away, and at least two of them—the madam and Emily—are planning how the latter is to make good her escape."

"I suppose you think they are sitting down quietly, and doing all that; eh?"

"Precisely."

"Well, I don't. Look here, if you were making a get-away of that sort, would you stop to change your shirt before you started? It strikes me that they didn't make their get-away from this room in any such manner as that."

"I think that we have already agreed that the hotel people are interested in this thing, haven't we?" Nick asked quietly.

"Yes."

"I mean in the gambling room, of course—not in the escape of a murderer."

"I understand."

"Well, if there are rooms below these that are used as adjuncts to the gambling room by which the patrons can escape, doesn't it follow that there are other

refuges, also, in the hotel, where they can hide for a while, and later make their escapes in pairs, or singly, unnoticed?"

"I see."

"It wouldn't look nice, would it, to see more than a score of persons in evening dress rushing pell-mell from the hotel to the streets. How far do you suppose they would get before some copper stopped one or more of them to find out what had happened?"

Not very far."

"I should say not! And don't you suppose that the hotel people know that as well as you do?"

"Surest thing you know, Nick."

"Let us say that there were thirty persons in this room. There were about that number, I should say."

"I think so."

"It's a safe bet that many of them—possibly a third of the number—live here in the hotel, and could go quietly to their rooms; eh?"

"Yes."

"And each could take at least one other person along, so that would dispose of two-thirds of the total number."

"Leaving ten or a dozen uncared for."

"And the madam, who is the manager, and who is sharper than a needle and smarter than a steel trap, would know how to care for them."

"Without a doubt."

"We have already decided that it is likely that the madam is friendly to Emily."

"Yes."

"So we can safely assume that she is now caring for Emily—somewhere in this hotel."

"By Jove! I had not thought of that."

"I don't think we will have to pursue her outside of it. We are bound to catch her inside of it, Platzek."

"Provided we do not wait too long before we begin the catching."

"I suppose you would begin it by making a room-to-room search; eh?"

"Something like that. No! By thunder, no! I would not, either!"

"How would you do it, then?"

"I think if I were alone on this thing just now, I would go down to the office and hold up the manager——"

"And you would be told, most politely, that he is the manager only, and not the proprietor; that he knows nothing about the things you would talk about, and you would only be laughed at for your pains."

"Then, how the blazes——"

"Hasn't it ever occurred to you, Plat, that there are always several persons who are 'wise' in a matter of this kind?"

"Sure. But—— Well, what?"

"There is the manager; there are two or three or more of the clerks; there are the bellhops who wait upon these rooms; there are the waiters who serve things in these rooms; there are——others. Now, whom shall we select as being the most likely to afford us information?"

"Give it up. You've got me guessing."

"We want somebody who will tell us what we want to know; eh?"

"Of course."

"And it's a safe proposition that the regular and well-paid employees, such as the manager and his assistants, and the clerks at the desk, the waiters who receive big tips—it is a safe proposition that none of those people would give up, at least without hesitating so long a time that their information wouldn't be worth anything."

"True. Well, I don't see what you are going to do."

"What time is it, Plat?"

"Five minutes to twelve," replied the latter, looking at his watch. "We have been in these rooms only a little more than an hour."

"Come on, then. They change some of the watches down below, don't they, at midnight?"

"I suppose so."

"It's a three-to-one shot that the young woman who operates the exchange board for the hotel telephone will go off duty at twelve. Come on. It will take her about ten minutes—perhaps less—to put the pins in

her hat and don her gloves. We ought to catch her nicely."

"You don't suppose that she will talk, do you?"

"I propose to make her talk, and that at once," was the grim reply. "Don't say a word while we are in the elevator, but help me to spot that girl when we get to the office floor."

"You bet. That will be easy, too, for I happen to know her by sight."

"How is that?"

"She was the last one to hear the voice of Jim Powhattan, who shot himself to death in his room, here, about three months ago. It might have been thought a murder only for her testimony, and the fact that she heard him telling over the phone that he had a good notion to blow his brains out. I was on that case, and I talked with her."

They stepped into the elevator, then, and were quickly transferred to the office floor. As they stepped out of the elevator, Platzek said:

"She does go off duty at midnight, too; I remember that. I'll find her, and bring her to you. Where shall I find you?"

"Outside—at the main entrance on the avenue. Don't lose any time."

"No."

"And remember that you are a tagged man now."

"What do you mean by that?"

"The madam hasn't lost any time in telling the proper persons that you and I were in the gambling room to-night."

Nick left him then and strolled slowly through the corridor to one of the side entrances. There he went out, and passed around to the main entrance on the avenue, where he stationed himself and waited.

He noticed, as he passed through the corridor, that one of the hotel detectives eyed him rather askance, and he thought to himself: "That fellow knows about the business. If the telephone girl fails me, I think I know a way to make him talk."

It was four minutes past twelve when Nick Carter took up his station beside the main entrance. He had

to wait only a very short time, when Platzek, accompanied by the young woman, put in an appearance; but that was not all. They were followed to the door by two of the hotel employees, one of whom touched the telephone girl on the arm as she was stepping from the doorway.

"Excuse me, Miss Glass," he said politely. "Mr. Melix, the manager, wishes to see you in his office at once."

"She can't go back now. She is under arrest," said Nick, stepping forward quickly, as the girl would have obeyed the summons.

He knew, by what had happened, that she had been seen to start away in the company of Platzek; and that she had been called back because of that. "Tell Mr. Melix so," he added.

The girl, frightened, and not knowing which way to turn, or who Nick Carter might be, turned an appealing glance toward Platzek, whom she knew for what he was.

"Is that true?" she faltered. "Am I under arrest? I haven't done anything. Oh, what does it mean?"

"There, there," replied Platzek. "Calm yourself. You are not exactly under arrest, but we must detain you a moment. This gentleman," pointing to Nick, "is an officer, the same as I am. He is my superior, in fact," he lied glibly. "He wants to ask you some questions, and you will have to answer them. That is all."

In the meantime, the employee who had been interfered with by Nick, gave the alarm, and many people began to crowd forward toward them, where they stood upon the steps.

Nick reached out and touched the frightened girl gently upon the arm.

"Mr. Platzek speaks truly," he said soothingly. "You are not exactly under arrest, although I cannot promise you that it will not happen, if you should refuse to reply to a few questions I must ask you. To refuse the information I want, and which you have to give, would compel me to extreme measures; and, as for the other part of it—if you, by any chance, should lose your position because you talk with me, I will

promise you a better one with more pay to take the place of it. Platzek!"

"Yes."

"Wait here till I return. I will be back inside of ten minutes. This young woman and I are going to drive around the block in that taxi yonder. If she tells me what we want to know, and must know, I'll send her on to her home when I come back here to you. That is all for the present."

The throng about them was increasing in numbers all the time, for now the knowledge that something unusual was going on had become general.

But Nick hurried the girl to the taxi, and held the door of it open while she took her place inside. Then he stepped in after her and slammed the door shut, having told the driver to take them slowly around the block and back again.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST OF THE BULWERS.

"Now, Miss Glass," said the detective, as soon as they started forward, "I am not going all the way around the block with you. It will not be necessary. You are not in the slightest danger, and I will step out of this cab in less than two minutes, and tell the driver of it to take you safely home, if you will tell me what I know you can tell me."

"But, sir," she faltered, "what is it all about?"

"You operate the hotel telephone board, do you not?"

"Yes."

"And your hours there are what?"

"From twelve to six in the afternoon, and from eight to twelve at night."

"Exactly. You know who Madame Icard is, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"About twenty minutes ago she left her own apartments, the Princess Suite, and went to another part of the hotel. I want you to tell me where she is now—because I know that she must have used the telephone immediately after she made the change."

"Oh, is that all? I can do that easily," the girl exclaimed.

"Well?"

"She is down on the mezzanine floor, in Suite D, which consists of three rooms. Is that all you wish to know?"

"Not quite. There is a person with her—a woman—for whom she probably ordered a conveyance—a taxicab, or a car. Doubtless she directed that it be sent as soon as possible to one of the side entrances to the hotel, or to a servants' entrance, or even to one of the freight elevators. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me about that."

"It was a private talk that she had with the manager, sir."

"That makes no difference, as long as you overheard it."

"It was only an accident that I did so. I——"

"Never mind that. Tell me what was said."

"I'll lose my job."

"I will promise you that, if you do, you shall have another one."

"Very well. She said that she wanted Mr. M's—he's the manager; that's what we call him—private car sent around to the door of Suite D——"

"Has that suite a private door of its own? I thought you said it is on the mezzanine floor."

"It is; but there is a spiral staircase from one of the rooms to a room below it, and there is an outside door there. He understood what was meant."

"Go on, then."

"She wanted the car at once. He told her that he could send another car, but not that one. She told him that she didn't care what car it was, only that she wanted Barney—he's Mr. M's chauffeur—to drive. He told her that Barney was out with the car, but was due back at any moment."

"Well?"

"She asked him, then, if he could promise to have the car at the door at twelve-thirty, sharp, and he said he could. She said that would answer, and he asked her why she was so particular about having Barney.

She replied that it was because she had a friend that wanted to get away without being seen. He asked her if it was a woman, and she said it was."

"Is there any more, Miss Glass?"

"He said: 'What's the matter, anyhow?' Just those words."

"And she replied—what?"

"With one word—or with two or three words all run together."

"What was it that she said?"

"The get-away. That's all."

Nick opened the door and called to the driver to stop. Then he stepped down, and asked the girl for her address, which he gave to the driver, together with a bill, and directed him to take her home. Then he said to her:

"If you have any trouble because of what you have told me, find Mr. Platzek and ask him to bring you to me. I am Mr. Carter."

"What! The detective——"

"Yes. Good night!"

He closed the door and hurried away, running back to the hotel as rapidly as he could do so without attracting too much attention. He entered it through the café, unnoticed, and passed rapidly along the corridors to the stairs, where he ascended to the mezzanine floor. In a few moments he came to a stop before the closed and—as he very speedily discovered—the locked door of Suite D.

But locked doors never held any terrors for Nick Carter, no matter how complicated the mechanism.

An instant sufficed to withdraw his self-invented "pick-lock" from the pocket where he kept it, and, after a little experimenting, he threw back the bolt of the lock noiselessly, and pushed the door open slowly and silently.

He found himself in a room in which only one light was burning, and that was shaded to dimness by a thick, green globe; but it gave him light enough to see across the room to a second closed door.

This also was locked, and this time the key, an ordinary one, was in the lock, inside the door; but the burglar's forceps, which always kept company with

the picklock in the same pocket, quickly disposed of this difficulty, and the detective quietly opened the second door.

Nick was just in time, as he peered inside, to see Madame Icard bending low over a trapdoor in the floor. This door she was raising, thus disclosing a flight of spiral stairs, as the telephone girl had said.

But that was not what interested the detective most at that moment.

He saw what has been described at a glance; and he also discovered a startling circumstance—one which compelled him to act quickly.

Emily Bulwer was standing beside a table at one side of the room, and opposite the trapdoor through the floor. Her left hand was resting upon the edge of the table, and the right held a pistol, with the muzzle pointed directly at the stooping woman, who was at that very moment assisting Emily to escape.

Never could there have been better proof of the homicidal mania of Emily Bulwer. She could not resist the temptation to kill, even when the victim of her murderous desire was a person who was in the very act of befriending her.

And Nick knew that Emily meant to kill. He could see it in her attitude, and in the gleam of her crazed eyes.

Never had Nick Carter acted more quickly than he did at that instant.

We all—who know Nick Carter—are aware of the two small pistols which he sometimes carries in the sleeves of his coat, fastened there by spiral springs of his own design—pistols which he can, by a single motion, throw into his hands and fire at the same instant; and we know, too, that no surer marksman ever lived than this famous detective.

It happened that the two pistols described were the only weapons that he had taken with him that night, and he had adjusted them only as an afterthought.

Releasing his hold upon the door, he raised his right hand, and then moved it downward with a sudden jerk. At this moment his weapon was discharged, and the ball it contained flew true to its mark.

It struck the barrel of the pistol which Emily Bulwer held, and knocked the weapon from her hand. As the

pistol fell, it was discharged. The bullet that had been designed for Madame Icard was buried in the wall.

Startled by the double report from behind her, Madame Icard wheeled, and screamed out in terror—turned just in time to see Nick Carter seize Emily and pinion her arms behind her.

Any person who has ever had to do with a frenzied maniac, will surmise what happened, and will understand how difficult it was for Nick Carter, even with his great strength, to subdue her.

But he succeeded, although it was only after the hotel doctor had been summoned, and a strong sedative had been administered that the demented woman could be controlled at all.

From that moment until she died, a month later, Emily Bulwer was a raving maniac, who was kept constantly in a strait-jacket.

But her career of terror was ended forever.

Nick turned to Madame Icard as soon as he had succeeded in partly controlling Emily.

"Madam, I have nothing to do with your occupation upstairs. That is a matter that does not concern me. I shall merely inform the proper authorities, to-morrow morning, of what I know, and if you are wise you will put a considerable distance between the City of New York and yourself, in the meantime."

And so Nick Carter's pursuit of the mysterious woman was ended for all time, and the last of the Bulwers was quieted at last.

THE END.

"The Metal Casket Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Strange Client," is the title of the story in the next issue of this weekly. It is a thrilling tale, relating how the services of Nick Carter were engaged by the most extraordinary client the famous detective ever had. Surprises incessantly spring up to baffle the great criminal investigator in his attempt to solve one of the queerest and most perplexing mysteries ever brought to his attention. In his quest of a most ingenious crook, Nick Carter meets with a series of wildly exciting adventures on land and sea. Your heart will beat fast as you read this remarkable story. It is number 773; and will be out on October 21st.

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